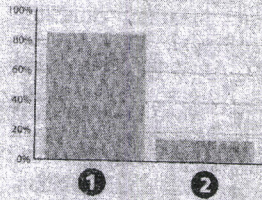


YESTERDAY'S QUESTION

Should welfare applicants be screened for drug use before receiving benefits?



1.

Yes: 85%

2.

No: 15%

(Online poll results. Results not scientific.)

COMMENTS

Responses selected from recorded messages and the online forum at www.greatfalls Tribune.com

“

Yes. Why should taxpayers pay for someone's drug habit?

— P.K., Great Falls

No, but maybe if it does pass, the legislators ought to go first and be tested along with them.

— P.G., Great Falls

Yes. If they've got money for drugs, they can buy their own food.

— D.R., Great Falls

Yes. Anybody that uses somebody else's money should be required to meet some standards.

— S., Great Falls

Yes. I had to pass a drug test to work to pay taxes to support those benefits. They shouldn't be able to freeload on them.

— J., Great Falls

No. Everybody who receives a state paycheck should be tested, not just welfare recipients.

— D.N., Great Falls

Yes. It's about time. We need to figure out what's more important: drugs, or feeding your family?

— T.M., Great Falls

Yes. Drug test everybody, especially those in the Senate. You drug test one, you test them all.

— A.S., Great Falls

House endorses bill that would drug test welfare applicants

The Associated Press

HELENA (AP) — The state House has endorsed a bill that would require welfare applicants to be screened for drug use before receiving benefits.



Pinocci

Lee Newspapers of Montana reports the House voted 56-44 Friday in favor of the measure. It faces a final vote before advancing to the Senate.

House Bill 200 was intro-

duced by Republican Rep. Randy Pinocci of Sun River. He says the measure is meant to help families dealing with drug addiction.

It would require people who apply for assistance under the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program to fill out a questionnaire about drug abuse. Staffers could recommend drug tests and people who test positive wouldn't receive benefits unless they complete a 30-day treatment program.

Opponents say the bill wrongly singles out poor people as potential drug addicts.

SENATE

PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE & SAFETY

Exhibit No.

\$ 2

Date

3/11/2015

Bill No.

HB 200

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H8 200
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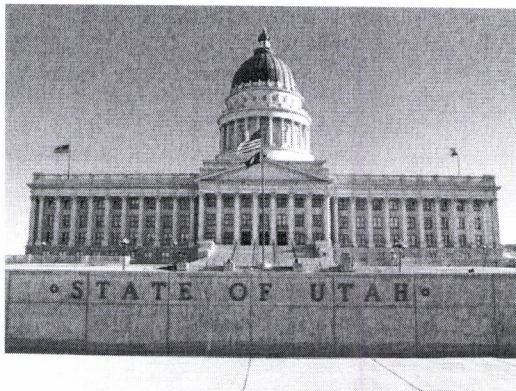
Utah's welfare drug testing saved more than \$350,000 in first year, officials say

2012-2013 data shows only 12 tested positive in screenings

By Michelle L. Price
 Associated Press

Published: Sunday, Sept. 8 2013 2:36 p.m. MDT

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Utah has spent more than \$30,000 to screen welfare applicants for drug use since a new law went into effect a year ago, but only 12 people have tested positive, state figures show.

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Summary

A new state program requiring drug screening for welfare applicants has saved more than \$350,000 in its first year, officials said.

More Coverage

- 2012-2013 data shows only 12 test positive in Utah welfare drug screening

SALT LAKE CITY — A new state program requiring drug screening for welfare applicants has saved more than \$350,000 in its first year, officials said.

Preliminary data show Utah spent more than \$30,000 from August 2012 to July 2013 to screen welfare applicants for drug use, but only found 12 people who tested positive.

Supporters of the program are pointing to about 250 people who failed to meet drug screening requirements during the year and were barred from receiving or applying for benefits for three months.

Those people would have otherwise received more than \$350,000 in benefits, according to the state Department of Workforce Services, which administers the welfare program and the drug screening.

"The whole purpose is to get people back to work," said Rep. Brad Wilson, a Kaysville Republican who crafted the screening law. "We can't get them back to work if they refuse to get into the program and do what they need to do."

Opponents of the policy say it unfairly stigmatizes poor people.

"There is this notion that if you're struggling to find employment, it must be because you're using drugs," said Gina Cornia, executive director of Utahns Against Hunger and a longtime activist seeking a welfare overhaul.

Utah is one of at least eight states that have passed legislation requiring drug testing or screening for public

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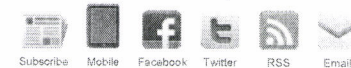
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assistance applicants. Similar laws were proposed in at least 29 states this year, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

In other states, the policies have faced legal challenges over claims they violate protections against searches without probable cause.

Utah, which does not randomly target applicants or require all applicants to undergo a drug test, has not faced such a challenge.

Instead, applicants to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program must complete a written questionnaire designed to screen for substance abuse. Drugs tests are then performed on those rated as having a high probability of using drugs.

Utah's law also doesn't disqualify people who test positive from receiving benefits. Instead, it requires them to enter substance abuse treatment.

The policy is not based on assumption that a large population of welfare applicants use drugs, Wilson said.

"But if we can help the 10 percent or so that are challenged with this, why wouldn't we?" he said.

The law identifies those with drug issues early on in the process, and if they aren't willing to get help or meet the requirements, they shouldn't get benefits, Wilson said.

The operating assumption is that people abandoned the process because they have a substance abuse issue, Wilson said, but that's something policy makers would like to dig into more.

The next step, Wilson said, "is to find out why those 250 people would rather not get benefits and keep using drugs, and what we can do to maybe help them realize that is a poor choice."

There's no information about why those 250 people failed to meet the requirements, so it's a leap to assume they all had drug issues, Cornia said.

If Utah is serious about addressing barriers to employment, the state should be just "as vigilant and committed" to much more common struggles that applicants face, such as mental health problems, a lack of training or literacy or domestic violence issues, Cornia said.

"We need to genuinely address all the barriers — not just the ones that are politically popular," she said.

Follow Michelle L. Price on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/michellelprice>

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• 2012-2013 data shows only 12 test positive in Utah welfare drug screening

